Spring Cleaning: Meditation to Clean Up the Mind

“When your room is clean and uncluttered, you have no choice but to examine your inner state.” - Marie Kondo, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up

For many of us, spring cleaning typically brings to mind images of clearing out the overabundance of clutter in our garage, attic, home, or office, and perhaps even painting or rearranging our living spaces to give us a new sense of freedom, openness, and expansiveness in our immediate environment. Yet, rarely do we consider purging the clutter of our mind a necessary step in our annual spring purification processes.

Marie Kondo, in her book, The Life-Changing Magic of Tidying Up, suggests an efficient process by which we can select the things we want to keep. She has her readers filter their criterion through the simple question, “Does it spark joy?” While Kondo’s book is primarily focused on how to tidy up one’s physical environment, her guidance can be metaphorically superimposed over the concept of clearing out mind clutter as well.

Marie writes, “There are several common patterns when it comes to discarding. One is to discard things when they cease being functional—for example, when something breaks down beyond repair or when part of a set is broken. Another is to discard things that are out of date, such as clothes that are no longer in fashion or things related to an event that has passed. It’s easy to get rid of things when there is an obvious reason for doing so.” Marie invites people to ask themselves, “Does this item spark joy?”

We’ve all heard that if our environment is a mess, so is our mind and vice versa. A home or office that is overwrought with clutter will likely have a similar effect on our mind, which will take on characteristics of being overburdened. Likewise, when our minds are overrun by thoughts, ideas, deadlines, and to-do’s, our environment will usually be a mirror image of what’s going on inside our internal world. Taking the time to clear out the old thoughts and ideas from our mind is an essential ingredient to keeping our head on straight and focused on things that are new, fresh, inspiring, and purposeful.

In nature, spring represents the cycle of birth with the thawing of ice and budding of new flowers. It’s the beginning stages of nature waking up after a long, deep rest and stretching her arms to greet a new season. So too, can we explore the metaphor of ‘waking up’ in the springtime after having retreated inward for the past several months to rest and recharge. What thoughts or ideas in our mind are ready to be pruned and what fresh, new ones are waiting to be birthed?

Any way you look at it, spring cleaning is a great time to clear out anything that is no longer serving you so you can make way for new ideas, perspectives, intentions, and desires.

Source: Chopra.com
Educational Corner: Can You Recognize the Signs of Skin Cancer?

With skin cancer the most common type of cancer in the United States, you should learn to spot its early signs, a cancer doctor says.

"Early detection is key. When detected early, most skin cancers may be effectively treated and are often curable," said Dr. Jeffrey Farma, a surgical oncologist at Fox Chase Cancer Center in Philadelphia.

"Individuals play an important role in early detection," Farma said in a center news release. "By being familiar with your own skin markings, like moles, freckles and blemishes, you’re likely to notice any changes."

His recommendation: Have your skin checked yearly by a physician or dermatologist, and check your own skin for signs of skin cancer by using a mirror every month.

Using the ABCDE rule of skin cancer can help identify potential problems, including the most deadly form of skin cancer, melanoma, he said.

**A for Asymmetry.** Melanoma lesions are often not symmetrical in shape, while benign moles are usually symmetrical.

**B for Border.** Benign moles usually have smooth, even borders, while melanoma lesions usually have irregular borders that are difficult to define.

**C for Color.** A mole with more than one color (blue, black, brown, tan, etc.) or the uneven distribution of color can sometimes be a warning sign of melanoma. Benign moles are usually a single shade of brown or tan.

**D for Diameter.** Melanoma lesions are often more than 6 millimeters in diameter, about the size of a pencil eraser.

**E for Evolution.** The evolution of your moles is important. Knowing what is normal for you could save your life.

"If a mole or marking has gone through recent changes in color and/or size, bring it to the attention of your doctor immediately so he or she can determine the cause," Farma said.

"Remember that skin cancer affects people of all skin tones, no matter what their complexion."

Source: Everyday Health

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Healthy Cooking: Mango Shrimp Tacos

**Ingredients:**
1 lb. large shrimp, peeled and deveined
1 packet taco seasoning
1 tablespoon olive oil
1 package corn or flour tortillas
Optional toppings: queso fresco, sliced avocado, extra chopped cilantro

*Sweet Chili Lime Crema*
1 cup plain Greek yogurt or sour cream
The juice and zest of 1 lime
1 teaspoon honey
1/2 teaspoon chili powder
A pinch of salt

*Mango Salsa*
2 ripe mangoes, peeled and diced
1 red onion, diced
1-2 jalapenos, seeded and diced
1/2 cup chopped fresh cilantro
The juice of one lime

**Directions:**
1. **For the mango salsa:** Toss all ingredients together, and season with salt and pepper, to taste.
2. **For the sweet chili lime crema:** Whisk all ingredients together, and add more honey or salt, to taste.
3. Toss the shrimp with the taco seasoning in a large bowl until the shrimp are evenly coated.
4. Heat olive oil in a large pan over medium-high heat. Add the shrimp and sauté for 4-6 minutes until the shrimp are completely opaque and cooked through. Remove from the heat, transfer the shrimp to a separate plate, and set aside.
5. To assemble, portion the shrimp between 6-8 tortillas. Drizzle with the sweet chili lime crema, and add the mango salsa and additional toppings. Serve warm.
Why Spring Is the Perfect Time to Take Your Workout Outdoors

When the weather thaws, the plants bloom and the days get longer, it’s spring—and the best time of the year to take your fitness regimen outside. Here are six research-backed perks of al fresco exercise.

You work harder
When people exercise outside, they tend to spend more time doing it. One study found that older people who were active outdoors did at least 30 minutes more moderate-to-vigorous physical activity per week than those who only did it inside. It also made them feel healthier. “Nothing makes you feel more childlike than being outdoors,” says Dr. Pamela Peeke, a fellow of the American College of Sports Medicine and author of Fit to Live. “You’re modulating stress hormones, increasing endorphins and increasing the secretion of serotonin,” she says, so your mood brightens.

Being in nature lowers blood pressure
Spending time outside is also good for the heart. A recent study estimated that nearly 10% of people with high blood pressure could get their levels under control if they spent at least 30 minutes in a park each week, partly because of the heart-related benefits of getting fresh air and lowering stress. In Japan, public health experts recommend people spend time walking outdoors, a practice called forest bathing, or shinrin-yoku. Researchers in Japan have linked forest bathing with lower levels of the blood pressure-raising stress hormone, cortisol.

It can feel more fun
When people exercise outside, they feel better and enjoy the exercise more, studies suggest. “Enjoyment is an important pathway to the mental health impacts of physical activity,” says Rebecca Lovell, a research fellow at the University of Exeter in the UK. Exercising outside is also a great alternative for those who don’t want to go to the gym. A review of research found that people who exercised outside reported feeling more revitalized, engaged and energized than those who did it indoors. The researchers also found that people who exercised outside felt less tension, anger and depression.

Your mental health may improve
Nature has a way of making people feel calm, and exercising outside can strengthen that effect. A small 2015 study found that people who walked for 90 minutes outside were less likely to ruminate on their problems and had less activity in the brain area linked to depression, compared to people who took similar walks but in urban areas. “Nature becomes a major distraction from all the stresses of life,” says Peeke.

You save money
Exercising outdoors is not only convenient, but it’s less expensive than a gym membership. It also cuts costs for the community. A recent study in England of “green exercises”—those done outside, including dog walking, running, horseback riding and mountain biking—estimated that the health benefits of doing physical activity in nature can save around $2.7 billion a year. “All you need is the right pair of shoes, and you can exercise on your own time,” says Peeke.

Source: Time Magazine
Summer means vacations for many people. Traveling by car, plane or train can mean eating unhealthy food at restaurants so here are a few tips for healthier eating on the road...

- **Pack snacks in your bag.** If you are flying, you can pack healthy snacks in your carry-on bag such as trail mix, individual bags of nuts, or granola bars (such as RX bars, Lara bars). If you are traveling by car, pack a bag or cooler with healthy snacks such as fresh fruit or veggies, cheese sticks, whole grain crackers, plain greek yogurt, trail mix, or hummus.

- **Make healthy choices at fast food restaurants.** Try making healthier choices when eating out such as sandwiches without cheese, salad with low fat dressing, replace French fries with sliced fruit or side salad, and swap fried meats for grilled or baked options.

- **Read labels.** Stopping at convenience stores for a snack can easily lead to unhealthy choices. Read the nutrition facts label. Pick beverages that are lower in calories and sugar and pick snacks such as yogurt, cheese, fruit, or trail mix. Remember that some prepackaged foods may look like a single serving but actually contain multiple servings.